

The Problem

One of the oldest creatures on Earth, sharks have dominated the oceans for more than 400 million years. Despite their image as fearsome predators, sharks are among the most vulnerable animals in the sea. Unless we act now, their days may be numbered.

Increased Shark Catch

Skyrocketing international demand for shark fins and other shark products is driving a massive increase in shark fishing around the world. In every corner of our oceans, sharks are being taken from the sea in record numbers.

Information about the health of shark populations worldwide is woefully inadequate. What little we do know is alarming: Worldwide, the killing of sharks has nearly quadrupled from 201,000 metric tons in 1947 to 789,862 metric tons in 1997. The toll is probably much higher because many countries fail to collect and report information on shark fishing and bycatch.

More than 125 countries participate in shark trade. Shark fins, meat, liver, and other parts are sold for food or as ingredients in health and beauty aids (see “Sharks for Sale”). Shark fins have become one of the world’s most valuable commodities and can fetch up to \$256 per pound. In Hong Kong, a single bowl of shark fin soup can sell for as much as \$90.

Slow Reproduction

Unlike other fish that rapidly reproduce, the shark is particularly susceptible to exploitation because it has a long life span and low reproductive rate. Many sharks do not reach sexual maturity until late in life (some begin reproducing when they are 25 years old) and produce only a small number of offspring. As a result, sharks are unable to rebound when populations are depleted by overfishing. Sharks are often the unintended victims – or bycatch – of vessels seeking other fish.

Poor Management

Tragically, sharks may be the least protected of all ocean wildlife. Governments are just beginning to take steps to conserve these ecologically important animals. Of the roughly 125 countries and territories involved in international trade of sharks and shark products, only four have specific management plans for shark fisheries. There is no effective international management regime for shared populations.

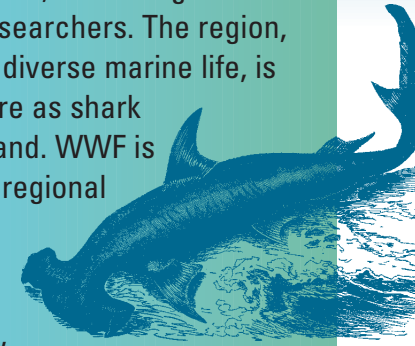
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Sharks have a low reproductive rate.

Sharks cannot quickly rebound from overfishing.

New Shark Discoveries in the Philippines

Several new species of sharks were recently discovered in Philippines seafood markets, according to WWF sponsored researchers. The region, known for its diverse marine life, is under pressure as shark fisheries expand. WWF is working with regional experts and government leaders to establish new measures that protect this remarkable diversity for future generations.

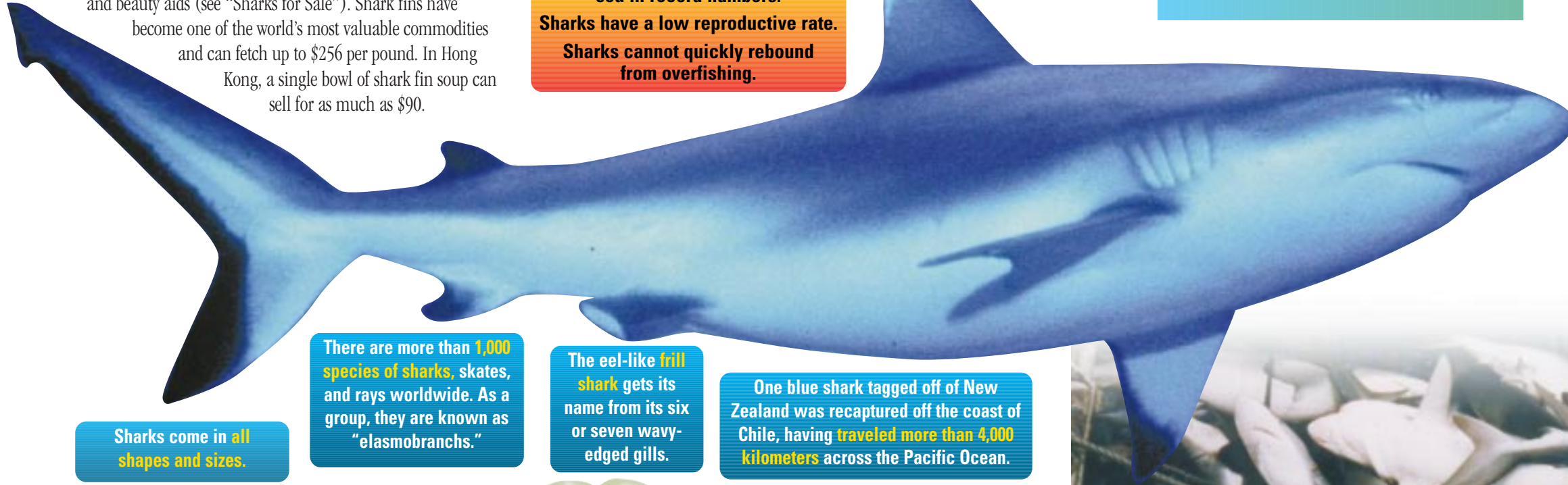
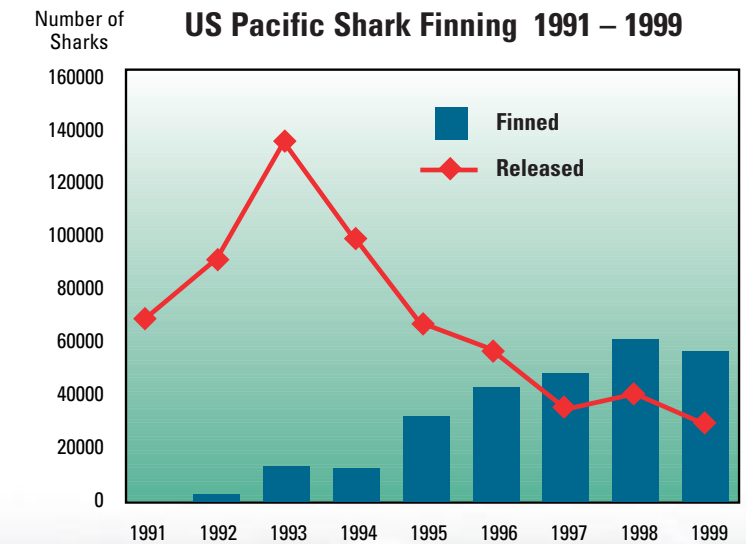


Pacific Sharks in the Balance

Sharks in the U.S. waters of the Pacific are under mounting pressure as fisheries in this region expand. A multitude of shark species are caught here – including the mako, which swims at speeds of up to 50 mph, and thresher sharks, which use their long, scythe-like tails to stun prey.

Between 1991 and 1999, the number of sharks killed in the Hawaii-based tuna and swordfish fisheries increased by 2500 percent. Of those killed, 99 percent are taken for their fins alone – the bodies are discarded at sea.

While management measures recently adopted for these fisheries limit the number of sharks that can be landed, nothing has been done to encourage fishermen to avoid catching sharks. Research indicates that some very simple management measures and fishing practices may well significantly reduce the bycatch of sharks in the fishery.



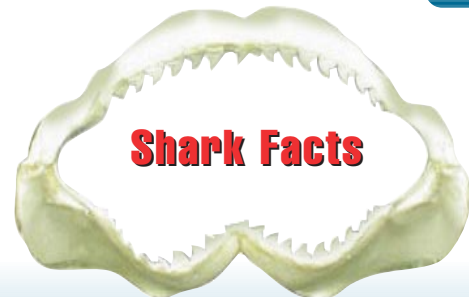
Sharks come in all shapes and sizes.

There are more than 1,000 species of sharks, skates, and rays worldwide. As a group, they are known as “elasmobranchs.”

The eel-like **frill shark** gets its name from its six or seven wavy-edged gills.

One blue shark tagged off of New Zealand was recaptured off the coast of Chile, having **traveled more than 4,000 kilometers** across the Pacific Ocean.

Many sharks share biological characteristics that make them vulnerable to human depredation: they are **slow-growing** animals, they reach sexual maturity late in life, and they produce small numbers of young.



Shark Facts

The **elephant-fish** has a trunk-like snout that is probably used to detect buried prey.

Sharks swim by **throwing their bodies** into a continuous series of undulations from front to back – almost as if they are rolling a ball down the side of their bodies.

Millions of sharks are **killed each year** for every person attacked by a shark.

The **Lucifer dogfish** is one of the smallest of a number of deepwater dogfish with luminescent bellies that may help attract prey.

Blue sharks live in almost all the world’s oceans, but prefer waters between 12 and 20 degrees C – so they live in deeper in the water column in tropical areas.

The **electric ray** drifts within an inch or so of a fish, located at night while asleep. It stuns the fish with an electric shock and envelopes it with its wings

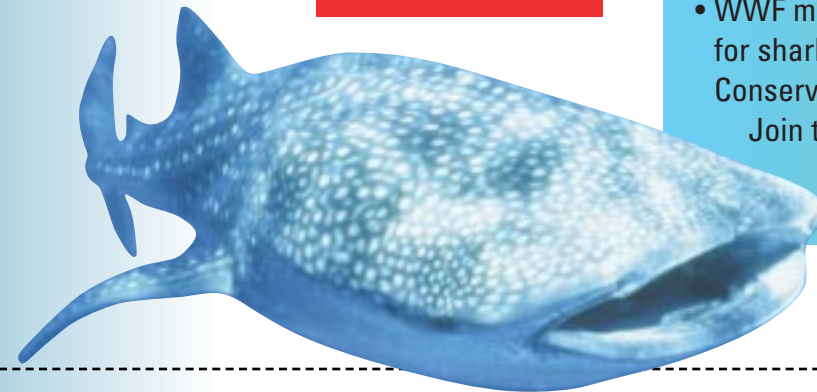
Sharks are so **sensitive to electric fields** that some scientists believe that they can detect Earth’s magnetic field, and that they use this to navigate during long migrations.

Sharks for Sale

Sharks are in demand for their meat, fins, skin, liver oil, and cartilage. Here are some facts on shark trade:

- For more than a thousand years, the fibers and collagen in shark fins have been used to produce shark fin soup, a popular dish in China. Growing demand for shark fins among Asian communities, and the high prices that have resulted, has spurred an increase in shark fishing around the world. In many cases, fishermen cut the fins off the sharks and throw their bodies overboard.
- Shark skin is used to produce a variety of leather products. Tanning takes place in Europe, Japan, Australia, Mexico, and many other countries.
- Shark liver oil, once an important source of vitamin A, is used today in the textile and tanning industries and as an ingredient in a wide range of products including perfume, sanitary wipes, and hemorrhoid ointment.
- Shark cartilage is sold in health food stores as a purported treatment for cancer. There is no scientific evidence of its efficacy.
- World exports of shark meat have more than doubled in the past decade.

The US Federal Trade Commission ordered two companies to stop promoting products made from shark cartilage as anti-cancer treatments – including a fine of \$1 million for one of the companies for false advertising.



Sharks at WWF

In collaboration with conservation partners around the world, WWF is playing a leadership role in the effort to protect biologically important shark populations.

- WWF is spearheading an initiative with governments around the globe to implement a new **United Nations Plan of Action** for shark conservation. The Plan calls on nations to: (1) improve the recording and reporting of shark catches, landings, and trade; (2) adopt management measures that will assure sustainable fishing for sharks in national waters; and (3) establish regional management arrangements to assure cooperation in designing, implementing, and enforcing shark conservation measures.
- Here in the U.S., WWF works through an exciting partnership, the Ocean Wildlife Campaign, to strengthen conservation of sharks and other ocean giants. For more information, contact the Campaign's website at: www.audubon.org/campaign/lo/ow/
- WWF members are providing critical support for shark conservation through the Conservation Action Network (C.A.N.).

Join the Network at:

www.takeaction.worldwildlife.org

You Can Make a Difference!

- Help the World Wildlife Fund protect sharks in the Pacific. Fill out and mail this card to:
World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th St. NW, Washington, DC 20037
Attn: Marine Conservation Program
- Sign up for World Wildlife Fund's Conservation Action Network at www.takeaction.worldwildlife.org – and stay tuned for updates and action alerts to help conserve sharks.

Think twice before you buy shark products, especially shark cartilage, shark fin soup, and other products that come from depleted shark populations.

Let Your Concern About Sharks Be Known

To the members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council,
I am calling on you to develop a precautionary management plan that:

- Assures the long-term sustainability of sharks and other species.
- Makes the reduction of shark bycatch a top priority.
- Mandates performance standards for all fishing gear.
- Requires retention and full use of sharks from which the fins are removed.
- Establishes measures to protect shark nursery areas from overfishing and degradation.

Signed _____

Address _____

Email (optional) _____



Sharks in Trouble

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